

The Honorable Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero  
*Maga'hågan Guahån*  
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“On the Side of Working People”

*Håfa Adai!*

Every day, the People of Guam prove that in times of great challenge or significant opportunity, we are home to the most resilient, creative, and hardworking People in the world.

Generations of working People built the island we love. Every day, in ways big and small, working people repair our roads, clean our hotel rooms, serve our tables, and build the homes, schools, and bridges that keep our island moving.

Recently, Guam joined the nation in celebrating Labor Day--a holiday that was established by the efforts of organized labor to honor all workers --union and non-union alike. They are the reason we have the minimum wage, weekends away from work to rest and spend time with family, and basic protections in our workplaces. We are the inheritors of their progress and we have a moral responsibility to advance the cause of working People.

We need to help our people with policies based on democratic principles that support working people like raising the minimum wage. Let's give the 11,000 people on Guam who would benefit from a minimum wage increase a raise. While some members of our community have always--and will always oppose minimum wage increases, the verdict is in. A Guam-based study measuring the impacts of the last minimum wage increase found that our GDP went up, that the rate of inflation in the price of goods stayed generally flat, that work hours weren't lost, and that most People stayed on the job.

I am proud to know that Senator Joe San Agustin's proposal to raise the minimum wage has wide support among Democrats. And because people struggling on the minimum wage belong to both parties, I know our Republican Senators will follow suit.

A large portion of the island's working class comes from the hospitality industry, particularly in food and beverage, and, as minimum wage earners, they can barely afford to pay their bills. They often don't have any health insurance coverage and are sometimes forced to work multiple jobs just to afford rent or feed their children. For food establishments that assess a service charge, we should make sure all of it goes to the People who actually serve.

But raising the minimum wage and directing 100 percent of service charges to the employee are not enough.

We must give everyone willing to work the chance to learn a skilled trade in telecommunications, mechanics, construction, welding, and other trades we need. No

one who works a full time job should live in poverty. And a career in the skilled trades is a proven path to great paying jobs. Many successful tradesmen and women go on to start thriving small businesses of their own.

For years, the Guam Apprenticeship Program has partnered with the Private Sector to teach skilled trades and get hundreds of People employed. Now, that Program is set to expire in just four months. Senator Regine Biscoe Lee has proposed a bill to streamline and extend the life of this program.

Place it on my desk and I will sign it.

Supporting workers also means standing by them if they are injured on the job. Days after a holiday that celebrates workers, we should recommit ourselves to workers compensation laws that truly protect working people. For decades, hardworking People injured on the job have had to accept that the benefits they receive have not kept pace with what it costs to live on Guam.

We can and must do better. Send me a bill that brings Worker Compensation Benefits into the 21st century. I will sign it. Any Senator who stands for the rights of working people will find me standing with them.

What President Roosevelt said in 1938 about establishing a minimum wage is also true about raising it: Without question it starts us toward a better standard of living and increases purchasing power to buy the products of farm and factory.

For me, the test of a successful community is providing opportunity for those who want to work and taking care of those who are most vulnerable.

Let's raise the minimum wage. Let's keep the Guam Apprenticeship program working for a new generation of skilled labor. Let's write and pass a worker's compensation law fit for the 21st century; and let's give the service charge to those who actually serve.

Have a wonderful month and God Bless Guam!